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REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON HEART DISEASE, CANCER AND STROKE

In a report released December 9, 1964, by the White House, the President's Commission on Heart Disease, Cancer and Stroke recommended that the National Library of Medicine be provided with new legislative authorities and appropriation increases to enable it "to serve its logical and necessary function as the primary source for strengthening the nation's medical library system."

The Commission's report, entitled "A National Program to Conquer Heart Disease, Cancer and Stroke," called for the authorization and appropriation of "not less than $30 million per year for 5 years" for a new program of grants and contracts in support of improved medical library services. The Commission also recommended that the Library be provided with a further increase of $2 million a year for five years for intramural research and developmental activities. In addition, the Commission gave its endorsement to proposals for the establishment of a National Drug Information Clearinghouse, in association with the National Library of Medicine.

The following excerpts are taken directly from the report:

"Communications for Research

"The information explosion in biomedical science has created a massive communications problem. The enormous volume of new knowledge generated and reported each year has overflowed all the normal channels.

"The traditional main artery of research communications is the scientific journal. Some 1,500 journals related to biomedical science are presently published in the United States. Another 4,500 are published elsewhere in the world, in many languages.

"The core resource for managing materials in the biomedical sciences is the medical library system.

"At the heart of this system is the National Library of Medicine, now a part of the Public Health Service. The NLM publishes Index Medicus, a giant monthly bibliography of medical periodical literature. It operates interlibrary loan services and offers photoduplication of source materials. Its operations have been greatly strengthened in the past year with the activation, in December 1963, of the computer-based Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System (MEDLARS)--the largest such information storage and retrieval system yet devised for a published literature. Monthly publication of the

Index Medicus occupies only a small portion of MEDLARS capacity, potentially, it can also handle 150 recurring specialized bibliographies plus an many as 37,500 individual inquiries for bibliographic search in a given year.

"The rapid advance of electronic storage and retrieval systems is the brightest ray of hope in the otherwise cloudy picture of communications for research. But electronics cannot solve the problem alone.

"The present state of most medical libraries in the United States is lamentable--largely because libraries have not received their due share of the greatly increased attention and funding for research. The existing 87 medical school libraries--which should be the cream of the crop--have collections which fall, in total, 4 million volumes short of a desirable level. They are cramped for space and deficient in manpower.

"The Commission feels strongly that unless major attention is directed to improvement of our national medical library base, the continued and accelerated generation of scientific knowledge will become increasingly an exercise in futility." (--Resources for Research, Part I, Chapter 2, pp. 24-25.)

"Medical Libraries

"Recommendation 30. The Commission recommends that the National Library of Medicine be authorized and adequately supported to serve its logical and necessary function as the primary source for strengthening the nation's medical library system.

"Specifically, the Commission recommends:

"A. That $2 million per year for a 5-year period be made available to the National Library of Medicine for intramural research and developmental activities to explore new technologies for more efficient management and dissemination of the world's biomedical literature;

"B. That not less than $30 million per year for 5 years be authorized and appropriated to the National Library of Medicine for a program of grants and contracts to support improved medical library services in the United States--including facilities, resources, training of personnel, secondary publications, and library communications research;

"C. That broadly conceived legislation be initiated clearly authorizing the National Library of Medicine to assist medical libraries in the ways recommended herein.

"Communication of information to scientists and practitioners is critically important to progress in research and application of medical knowledge. Medical libraries are the primary vehicle for accomplishing this communication process.

"Yet the nation's medical library system is grossly inadequate for the task, due to a serious imbalance of extramural support. For example, in 1964 the Public Health Service appropriations totaled over $1 billion. But less than $1 million accrued directly or indirectly to the extramural support of medical libraries.

"A Clearinghouse for Drug Information

"Recommendation 34. The Commission endorses current proposals for the establishment of a National Drug Information Clearinghouse, in association with the National Library of Medicine, serving and supporting governmental and nongovernmental drug information units.

"The proposed clearinghouse would include full information on the chemical structures and biological properties of all known compounds and the derivatives of such chemicals, with regard for their cellular, environmental, and social effects. It would gather information from all reliable sources, including the published literature, conference proceedings, government reports, and other records. Further, the clearinghouse would produce, both for general and specific users, annotated bibliographies, systematic files of information on drugs in forms suitable for replication, critical reviews, compilations of evaluated data, judgmental responses to individual inquiries, and other appropriate information.

"Improper use of drugs is today an important cause of avoidable disease. The gaps and wasteful duplication associated with present independent efforts to handle drug information are responsible for much important information failing to reach those who need it most. Therefore, in view of the progressive increase in the consumption of medications and other chemical products, the proposed clearinghouse will serve an important national need." (--Additional Facilities and Resources, Part II, Chapter 7, p. 68.)

Among the specific changes in legislation and organization recommended by the Commission is the following:

"8. Authorization for a Program for the Support and Stimulation of a National Medical Libraries Network

"It is clear that a major factor inhibiting the reduction of the burden of heart disease, cancer and stroke involves the inadequacy of communications in the field of the medical sciences. Moreover, it is clear, as with the problems of health manpower supply, that the correction and improvement needed can only be achieved by attacking the fundamental reasons underlying the deficiencies.

"One of these fundamental factors involves the inadequacies of the medical libraries throughout the nation--another effect of the scientific revolution in which the advancement of knowledge has outstripped the ability to

manage it. Consequently, in order to facilitate scientific communications, substantive legislation is necessary, providing a flexible program of planning, stimulation and support of an improved National Medical Libraries Network to assure all areas and all medical schools, scientists, and practitioners of the benefit of effective access to all medical data and information.

"Recommendation

"A legislative proposal should be developed and enacted providing for the support and stimulation of a National Medical Libraries Network. Particular attention should be given to authorizations relating to recommendations of the President's Commission on Heart Disease, Cancer and Stroke concerning the establishment of a network of medical libraries including a limited number of regional libraries; library facility construction; training for medical librarians; and a program of research designed to improve systems and methods of handling medical literature." (--Legislative Recommendations, Part II, Chapter 8, p. 75.)

MEDLARS ADDS NEW EQUIPMENT

As part of a continuing program to update and improve its automated Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System (MEDLARS), the National Library of Medicine has recently acquired additional data processing equipment.

The new equipment consists of a Honeywell 200 computer, which will speed MEDLARS data input and output, and an accessory tape drive, which will permit the conversion of MEDLARS data tapes to a size compatible with other existing systems.

MEDLARS has been in operation since December 1963. The MEDLARS computer file now contains some 250,000 citations to the world's biomedical journal literature.

CHANGE IN HOURS FOR HMD READING ROOM

The Library's History of Medicine Division has announced plans to extend its hours of public service to include Saturday. Effective January 9, the HMD Reading Room will be open Monday through Saturday, 8:30 to 4:45.

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